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Sixteenth progress report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire

I. Introduction

1. The present report was prepared pursuant to Security Council resolution 1795 (2008), by which the Council extended the mandate of the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire (UNOCI) until 30 July 2008 and requested me to keep it regularly informed and to report, no later than 15 April 2008, on developments in Côte d'Ivoire, in particular on the preparation of the electoral process. The report covers major developments since my report of 2 January 2008 (S/2008/1), as well as the findings of a technical assessment mission that visited Côte d'Ivoire from 3 to 12 March 2008.

II. Security situation

2. The overall security situation in Côte d'Ivoire remained generally stable during the period under review. Although the security and political atmosphere throughout the country has continued to improve since the signing of the Ouagadougou Agreement in March 2007, the lack of progress on the disarmament of the Forces nouvelles and the dismantling of the militias in the west renders the prevailing stability fragile. Violent crimes, in particular armed robberies in the western part of the country, remain a major concern. During the month of February, more than 20 roadside armed robberies were reported along the Guiglo-Duékoué axis, while 10 armed attacks were reported in Bangolo. On 23 March 2008, a soldier from the defence and security forces of Côte d'Ivoire was killed in Duékoué by unidentified armed bandits. Subsequently, soldiers demonstrated in Duékoué, Guiglo and Bloléquin, shooting in the air and demanding the departure of the military governor whom they accused of failing to ensure the security of the military in the west. The situation returned to normal following a visit to the area by the Chief of Staff of the defence and security forces, Major-General Philippe Mangou.

3. On 27 December 2007, supporters of Sergeant Ibrahim Coulibaly, alias IB, who was formerly a member of the Forces nouvelles, were accused of attacking Forces nouvelles personnel in Bouaké. The attack resulted in several deaths, as well as in the arrest of a number of individuals. The Operation was rapidly deployed in Bouaké to help restore calm. The bodies of five persons believed to be supporters of Mr. Coulibaly, bearing gunshot wounds and torture marks, have been held at the

mortuary in Bouaké since late December, pending the outcome of criminal investigations. Eighteen individuals arrested in Bouaké in connection with the events were transferred to the civilian prison in Korhogo. In another incident, on 17 January, 11 individuals, including two French nationals, allegedly associated with Mr. Coulibaly, were arrested in Abidjan for plotting a coup. On 30 January, the prosecutor of the military court in Abidjan issued an international arrest warrant against Mr. Coulibaly, who is accused of conspiracy against the State.

4. On 31 March and 1 April, demonstrations in Abidjan and San Pedro against the rising cost of living turned violent. At least one person was reported to have been killed and 20 wounded during clashes between riot police and demonstrators, which also disrupted the mobile courts operations. The demonstrations stopped on 2 April, after the Government had announced emergency measures to curb taxes on food and basic services for a period of three months.

5. In the light of the steady improvement of the overall security situation over the past year, and after the recommendation of the designated official and a consultation with the United Nations security management team in Côte d'Ivoire, I have decided to lower the security phases in specific southern and northern areas in the Bondoukou-Bouna area to phase I, and in the western areas of Guiglo to phase III. In the rest of the northern part of the country, the security phase remains unchanged. The change in the security phases, which is in line with the recommendation of the Evaluation and Monitoring Committee at its meeting on 14 January, has been welcomed by the Government and the business community in Côte d'Ivoire.

III. Political developments

6. With the improving security and political climate in Côte d'Ivoire, the political parties have continued to increase their activities throughout the country. The Rassemblement des républicains held its convention in Abidjan on 1 February, during which its leader, Alassane Ouattara, was designated as the party's candidate for the anticipated presidential election. Mr. Ouattara subsequently publicly invited the Forces nouvelles to join the ranks of his party.

7. On 1 March, the Front populaire ivoirien, the ruling party, held a rally in Bouaké, the stronghold of the Forces nouvelles, with the participation of the Minister for Defence, Michel Amani N'Guessan, who is also the chairman of President Laurent Gbagbo's campaign for the presidential election. The party also started a campaign tour in the northern part of the country on 31 March.

8. On 8 March, Prime Minister Guillaume Soro was invited to Gagnoa, President Gbagbo's hometown, to participate in the commemoration of International Women's Day. On that occasion, Prime Minister Soro stated that, one year after the signing of the Ouagadougou Agreement, his partnership with President Gbagbo had remained strong and positive. He also expressed his appreciation for President Gbagbo's commitment to achieving peace in Côte d'Ivoire.

9. Civil society groups have continued to advocate for their inclusion in the implementation of the Ouagadougou Agreement. In that regard, the Facilitator of the Ivorian peace process, President Blaise Compaoré of Burkina Faso, has expressed his intention to convene a national consultative meeting that would include the participation of Ivorian civil society. Prime Minister Soro has also continued to

consult civil society actors in the implementation of the Ouagadougou Agreement. To that end, in February, he convened a seminar for women groups affiliated with the signatories of the Linas-Marcoussis Agreement. Participants at the seminar called on the Government to ensure that 30 per cent of the posts in public offices, in particular the legislature, be reserved for women.

10. On 14 January, the Facilitator convened the third meeting of the Evaluation and Monitoring Committee of the Ouagadougou Agreement, with the participation of the international consultative organ, which consists of the international partners of Côte d'Ivoire, including UNOCI. At the meeting, participants stressed, among other issues, the need to prioritize the electoral process and for the United Nations to elaborate, in consultation with the Government, the parameters and modus operandi of my Special Representative for Côte d'Ivoire in the certification of all stages of the electoral process, as called for by the Security Council in its resolutions 1765 (2007) and 1795 (2008). The Facilitator also convened the standing consultative forum of the Ouagadougou Agreement on 24 January. The consultative forum, comprising the main Ivorian political players (President Gbagbo, Prime Minister Soro, Henri Konan Bedié and Alassane Ouattara), urged the Government of Côte d'Ivoire to expedite the preparations for the elections, including by compressing the time frame for the publication of electoral lists, and stressed the need to guarantee equitable access by all candidates to the State-owned media. The meeting envisaged that the elections would be held in June 2008.

11. The Evaluation and Monitoring Committee met again on 21 March in Ouagadougou, under the chairmanship of President Compaoré, with the participation of Prime Minister Soro and the international consultative organ. The meeting welcomed the results of the mobile courts and recommended that the initial three-month duration be observed. The meeting recommended that the decrees related to the modalities for voter registration and for the collaboration between the technical operator and the National Institute of Statistics, as well as the contract with the French company, SAGEM, selected as the technical operator to produce national identity cards and voters cards, be concluded as soon as possible, in order to facilitate the announcement of a date for the elections. The meeting also recommended that the cantonment of combatants be accelerated, that the disarmament and dismantling of the militias start urgently and that the Government ensure appropriate funding for the cantonment operations and for the reintegration of ex-combatants. The Committee called on the parties to implement the provisions of the third agreement supplementary to the Ouagadougou Agreement, with regard to the re-establishment of fiscal and customs administration throughout the country.

12. President Gbagbo and Prime Minister Soro continued to consult with regional leaders. On 29 January, President Gbagbo travelled to Gabon where he held talks with President El-Hadj Omar Bongo Ondimba on the status of implementation of the Ouagadougou Agreement. On 6 March, Prime Minister Soro also held talks with President Bongo in Libreville. Meanwhile, the President of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Commission, Mohamed Ibn-Chambas, undertook a two-day visit to Abidjan, on 5 and 6 March, during which he announced that ECOWAS would financially support the electoral process and deploy electoral observers to Côte d'Ivoire. On 18 and 19 March, President Gbagbo travelled to South Africa where he apprised President Thabo Mbeki of progress made in the implementation of the Ouagadougou Agreement.

IV. Status of implementation of the Ouagadougou Agreement

A. Establishment of the integrated command centre

13. The integrated command centre has continued to build up its capacity and increase its activities with support from UNOCI and the French Licorne force. The strength of the centre now stands at 544 Forces nouvelles and national defence and security personnel, out of the authorized maximum of 568, including the mixed police units. However, its operational effectiveness continues to be hampered by lack of planning, logistics difficulties and its limited finance and operational capacity. Nevertheless, since my previous report to the Security Council (S/2008/1), the communications capability of the command centre has improved with the issuance of radio equipment by the Government. The lack of adequate funding for the operations of the centre, including for salaries and allowances for its personnel, remains a major challenge.

14. The Operation and the Licorne force continued to assist the integrated command centre in elaborating its operational plans and have established a cell within the centre comprised of military, police and civilian liaison personnel. The Operation is in the process of establishing and fully equipping an operations centre at the command centre headquarters in Yamoussoukro to support planning and coordination. The Operation also provides logistical and transport assistance to the command centre, as well as an infantry platoon for security purposes, in keeping with the provisions of the Ouagadougou Agreement.

B. Deployment of mixed units and gradual lifting of the green line

15. Since my report of 2 January 2008 to the Security Council (S/2008/1), UNOCI has removed all except 2 of the 17 observation posts it had established along the green line, in keeping with the provisions of the Ouagadougou Agreement. The progressive lifting of the green line continues to be based on a comprehensive threat assessment; consultations with the integrated command centre; and the improvement in the overall security situation, in particular the assessed low probability of military confrontation between the former belligerents. The mixed units continue to patrol the former zone of confidence, but their operations are still hampered by the lack of equipment and of salaries.

C. Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration

16. The third supplementary agreement had set 22 December 2007 as the new deadline for the commencement of the cantonment of the two armed forces. Although the deadline was not met, the commanders of the two armed forces have made efforts to begin their respective cantonment. On 24 January, the Chief of Staff of the defence and security forces announced that 12,000 of its soldiers had been cantoned and registered and had deposited their weapons in storage, in keeping with the provisions of the third supplementary agreement. Subsequently, the Chief of Staff announced that following the completion of that process within the stipulated 10-day period, the defence and security forces of Côte d'Ivoire soldiers had returned to their barracks.

17. The cantonment of Forces nouvelles elements has not significantly progressed. As of 1 April 2008, only 109 elements had been cantoned. Logistical and financial constraints, as well as the lack of a clearly defined reintegration programme, have combined to hinder progress in the cantonment of the Forces nouvelles personnel. Out of the 109, 42 are still cantoned in Ferkessédougou, while the rest have been demobilized and are awaiting reintegration opportunities. The Government has recently announced that $7 million would be made available for the payment of monthly allowances for cantoned ex-combatants, which should expedite the process.

18. The international community has provided considerable assistance to the cantonment process. At the request of the high command of the Forces nouvelles, a working group comprised of the impartial forces and the Forces nouvelles was established to develop an operational plan for the cantonment of their troops. The operation also constructed three cantonment sites at Ferkessédougou, Odienné and Kane, which were formally handed over to the integrated command centre on 17 March. These and three additional cantonment sites in Man, Bouaké and Korhogo were equipped by the international community.

19. The national programme for reinsertion and community rehabilitation, which is expected to absorb a caseload of 6,000 ex-combatants, has facilitated the registration and profiling of Forces nouvelles personnel. However, the programme faces serious funding and operational challenges. Although the Government announced that approximately $31 million would be provided to the institution during the 2008 fiscal year, the funds have yet to be disbursed. International donors, concerned about the programme's capacity to develop and manage reinsertion programmes, have redirected funds to other projects. For instance, the World Bank intends to launch a $40 million reinsertion and community rehabilitation programme that would mainly benefit youth at risk, but could also absorb some demobilized combatants.

20. The planned civic service programme, which is intended to absorb a caseload of 20,000 former combatants and 20,000 youth at risk, has yet to be launched. Although the project still exists only as a concept, the Government estimates that it would cost approximately $90 million. International partners have indicated their readiness to fund the important programme, if the Government involves them in designing and implementing it.

D. Disarmament and dismantling of militias

21. The third supplementary agreement called for resumption of the disarmament and dismantling of militias by 22 December 2007. The Government subsequently requested the integrated command centre to start the disarmament and dismantling by 18 February 2008. The Operation constructed and equipped four weapons collection points in Toulepleu, Bloléquin, Guiglo and Duékoué, which the Operation officially handed over to the Ivorian authorities on 17 March. However, the process remains stalled, primarily because of the absence of structured arrangements for conducting the operation and the lack of an agreement between the Government and militia leaders on the payment of stipends and reintegration arrangements for the militias.

22. The first batch of 2,000 militia members was registered in Guiglo in June 2006 and 981 of them were subsequently disarmed and received a cash safety net

allowance. The Government has since announced that it no longer intends to pay the stipend to the remaining 1,000 registered militias and that instead they should be reintegrated through the national civic service programme, which has yet to be defined and launched (see para. 20 above). Militia leaders have rejected that proposal as inadequate and have demanded the same package offered to those disarmed in June 2006.

E. Reunification of the armed forces

23. The third supplementary agreement had set 15 December 2007 as the deadline for the establishment of a framework for the organization, composition and functioning of the new national defence and security forces. That deadline was not met. President Gbagbo signed a decree on 20 February 2008 formalizing the establishment of a working group to develop the framework. Earlier, on 5 January 2008, the Facilitator had presented to the two parties a proposal on the numbers of Forces nouvelles personnel to be integrated into the new national defence and security forces. Under that proposal, 5,000 Forces nouvelles personnel would join the armed forces; the 600 Forces nouvelles security auxiliaries trained by UNOCI in 2006 would be integrated into the police and gendarmerie in order to contribute to the security of the electoral process; and 3,400 additional Forces nouvelles personnel would be assigned to the integrated command centre to participate in police and gendarmerie tasks and would subsequently join the national police or gendarmerie if they met the national recruitment criteria. Although the Ivorian parties have not formally responded to the Facilitator's proposals, the proposals have formed the basis for discussion by the working group that is developing the framework for reunifying the armed forces.

F. Restoration of State administration throughout the country

24. Out of the 24,437 civil servants who had been displaced during the conflict, only 6,094 have yet to return to their posts throughout the country. The national committee for the redeployment of State administration announced recently that it was still facing a funding shortfall of approximately $20.7 million to complete the redeployment exercise, in particular for the rehabilitation of about 3,510 public buildings. Following a request that UNOCI vacate four priority Government-owned buildings, the Operation has relocated its camps in Brobo, Logoualé and Odienné, while the relocation of the installation in Séguéla is scheduled to be completed in May 2008.

25. The third Ouagadougou supplementary agreement provided for the redeployment of finance and customs officials throughout the country by 30 December 2007. However, that process is facing serious challenges, including the absence of a comprehensive plan for the redeployment of the law enforcement, legal, judicial and corrections personnel required to provide the necessary support to the State officials. The Government has announced that the redeployment of the judiciary would not be possible prior to the completion of the mobile courts operations, as approximately 50 per cent of the country's judges are involved in the operations. The Ministry of Justice has established a specialized justice and corrections redeployment cell, with technical assistance provided by UNOCI, to facilitate the redeployment process for police, justice and corrections systems. The

European Union is financing the rehabilitation of 10 court buildings in the north of the country, while UNOCI is assisting efforts to secure funding for the restoration of prison facilities in the north.

G. Identification of the population and voter registration

26. The Ouagadougou Agreement sought to accelerate the identification of those Ivorians who were eligible to vote. In this regard, the Agreement provided that all individuals who were on the voters list in 2000 would be automatically eligible to receive national identity cards and voters cards; the ongoing mobile courts would issue duplicate birth certificates to Ivorians aged 18 years and above, whose births had never been recorded in civil registers, to enable them to register to vote; and the civil registers that had been lost or destroyed during the conflict would be reconstituted to enable all other Ivorians who might not have been included on the 2000 voters list to register to vote.

27. Since my previous report to the Security Council (S/2008/1), the number of mobile courts involved in the identification of the Ivorian population, which started on 25 September 2007, has increased from 33 to 111, thus reaching the number of technical teams that was initially envisaged for the operations. The 14 regional electoral offices of UNOCI have observed that the hearings have been free of major security incidents and that the courts have provided satisfactory ground coverage, although six sous-prefectures have not yet been covered. Statistics collected by the Operation's regional electoral offices are shared with relevant national institutions and ministries and will be analysed in the context of the certification of the pre-identification phase. As of 8 April, the total number of duplicate birth certificates issued since the first wave of mobile courts operations in 2006 stood at 565,854. The mobile courts are expected to complete their operations by the end of April.

28. With regard to the reconstitution of civil registers that were lost or destroyed during the crisis, the third supplementary agreement provided that the exercise should be launched by the end of December 2007. To date, the national commission for the supervision of the identification has conducted an assessment of the extent of the destruction or loss of civil registers throughout the country and has determined that an estimated 25 per cent of the civil registers have been destroyed or lost and will need to be reconstituted. On 20 March, the Ministry of Justice adopted the modus operandi for the reconstitution exercise, which, before implementation, should be formalized in a decree. The European Commission and the World Bank have indicated their intentions to provide funding for the exercise.

29. On 20 February, the Government adopted the technical specifications for the issuing of identity cards and voters cards, which will guide the various institutions involved. The contract between the Government and SAGEM was signed on 27 March 2008. However, the division of responsibilities between SAGEM and the National Institute of Statistics, which has traditionally produced the cards and is expected to conduct the identification and voter registration processes jointly with SAGEM, has yet to be defined. The identification and voter registration operations are expected to involve 6,000 mobile and fixed teams at 11,000 registration centres. The technical operator estimates that the process may take up to eight months to complete. The national commission for the supervision of the identification will

oversee the issuing of national identity cards, while the Independent Electoral Commission will supervise the registration of voters by SAGEM and the National Institute of Statistics.

H. The electoral process

30. The legal framework for the electoral process, including an ordinance modifying the electoral code and a decree on the modalities for the establishment of the new voters list, has yet to be finalized. With regard to the designation of polling stations, the Independent Electoral Commission, with assistance from UNOCI, has completed a mapping of 90 per cent of the 10,453 proposed stations using global positioning system technology.

31. The budget of the Independent Electoral Commission has been finalized and is estimated at $83 million. The Government of Côte d'Ivoire will provide $18 million, while the European Union, Japan and the Republic of Korea have pledged additional support in the amount of $25 million. There is therefore a shortfall of approximately $40 million. The Economic Community of West African States has also announced its intention to provide funds, once the Independent Electoral Commission has announced a date for conducting the polls.

32. In keeping with the provisions of Security Council resolution 1765 (2007), my Special Representative has elaborated a five-criteria framework for certifying all stages of the electoral process. The framework defines broad benchmarks that will enable my Special Representative to assess whether: (a) a secure environment exists during the period leading to the elections and allows for the full participation of the population and the candidates in the process; (b) the electoral process is inclusive; (c) all candidates have equitable access to State-controlled media and whether the latter remains neutral; (d) the electoral lists are credible and accepted by all parties; and (e) the results of the elections are determined through a transparent counting process and are accepted by all or are challenged peacefully through the appropriate channels. These benchmarks were defined in consultation with all national and international partners. My Special Representative is continuing consultations with all parties in order to ensure a common understanding of each benchmark and to secure agreement on a "red-lines" approach in conducting the certification process. The certification will be conducted in close coordination with the Facilitator of the Ivorian peace process who plays a key role in the mediation and arbitration of that process. My Special Representative will also consult widely with all major players in preparing his assessment of the electoral process.

V. Deployment of the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire

A. Military component

33. As at 8 April, the military strength of UNOCI stood at 8,034 personnel, comprising 7,745 troops, 193 military observers and 96 staff officers, against a total authorized strength of 8,115. Of the Operation's 11 battalions, 5 are deployed in the western part of the country, 4 in the east and 2 in Abidjan. One aviation unit, three engineering companies, one transport company and one special force company are

providing enabling capacity and operational reserve to the force. The Sous-Groupement de sécurité, comprising 279 personnel, continues to provide close protection for members of the Government and other dignitaries.

34. The Operation has continued the process of redeploying its troops from the former zone of confidence in order to reinforce its presence in the west and north of the country and to make additional troops available to support the integrated command centre in providing security for the various key processes under the Ouagadougou Agreement. In accordance with the Operation's new concept of operations, which provides for a shift from the previous static deployment in the zone of confidence to a configuration that enables the force to be more mobile and to cover the entire territory of Côte d'Ivoire in order to help the national security forces to provide a secure environment for the re-establishment of State authority, the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration exercise, the identification process and the elections, each battalion performs long-range patrols with a minimum strength of one platoon, which remain in the field for at least two days to monitor developments within their area of responsibility.

35. Despite a further reduction in February of the Licorne troops from 2,500 to 1,800, the French force continues to provide essential support to the Operation and maintains its full quick-reaction capability. Licorne also conducts long-range patrols to key areas of the country and works with UNOCI to provide capacity-building support for the integrated command centre and the defence and security forces of Côte d'Ivoire.

B. Police component

36. As at 7 April, 1,182 police personnel were deployed to UNOCI, against an authorized ceiling of 1,200, including 434 officers and 748 personnel deployed in six formed police units. The UNOCI police component focuses on providing support, mentoring and advice to the Ivorian national police and the mixed police units that are deployed in the former zone of confidence, and to the 600 Forces nouvelles security auxiliaries who were trained by UNOCI in 2006 and deployed in the northern part of the country. The UNOCI police component also provides technical support and advice to the integrated command centre with regard to security sector reform. The formed police units provide crowd control capacity in the event of illegal or unruly demonstrations and protect United Nations personnel, installations and property within their respective areas of responsibility.

VI. Technical assessment mission

37. At the request of my Special Representative, a technical assessment mission, comprising representatives of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, the Department of Political Affairs and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, visited Côte d'Ivoire from 3 to 12 March to assess the progress made towards preparing for the elections and to assist UNOCI in developing proposals concerning the role the Operation should play in supporting the remaining tasks under the Ouagadougou Agreement. The assessment mission met with a wide spectrum of international and Ivorian stakeholders, including President Gbagbo, Prime Minister Soro, the Chiefs of Staff of the defence and

security forces of Côte d'Ivoire and of the Forces nouvelles, representatives of political parties and the heads of the national institutions responsible for the implementation of the key processes under the Ouagadougou Agreement. It also held meetings with the special representative of the Facilitator of the Ivorian peace process, President Compaoré of Burkina Faso, representatives of the World Bank and the European Union, members of the diplomatic community, and representatives of civil society and national and international non-governmental organizations. Members of the assessment mission also travelled to Yamoussoukro, where they received briefings from the integrated command centre.

A. Findings of the assessment mission

38. The assessment mission witnessed a notable improvement in the overall political and security environment in the country. It also confirmed that all Ivorian parties were interested in holding national elections in 2008. The parties informed the mission that they were convinced that the Ouagadougou Agreement had ended the armed conflict and that the lingering political crisis could only be resolved through the holding of the elections. Both President Gbagbo and Prime Minister Soro expressed their confidence that the relative stability that had prevailed in Côte d'Ivoire since the signing of the Ouagadougou Agreement had allowed the country to proceed towards the elections, which should be held in 2008. This view is shared by the opposition parties, many civil society groups and all international stakeholders.

39. The road to the elections, however, is fraught with a treacherous mix of technical challenges, security and political risks. In addition, most of the key election-related processes are plagued by serious funding gaps, which are already impeding the electoral process and could undo the progress made so far. Despite considerable revenues from the cacao and oil industries in the south, the State is still unable to collect revenues from the northern part of the country. The Forces nouvelles zone commanders continue to control local structures so as to illicitly collect revenues for themselves.

40. The Prime Minister informed the assessment mission that another reason why the Government had not been able to provide all the funding for the key phases under the Ouagadougou Agreement was that its priority had been to clear the country's arrears to the World Bank, which amounted to $240 million, in order to resume its relationship with the international financial institutions and facilitate relief of its $19 billion debt through the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative. The Prime Minister confirmed that the Government had been able to meet its payment schedule throughout the previous year and had successfully cleared its arrears.

41. At the technical level, the electoral timelines themselves are problematic. The third supplementary agreement had envisaged that the presidential election would be held by the end of the first semester of 2008. All parties recognize that this date is no longer technically feasible. The chairman of the Independent Electoral Commission is expected to propose a date for the presidential elections, now that the contract between the Government and SAGEM for the production of national identity cards and voters cards has been concluded.

42. There are also concerns that the identification of the population, which lies at the centre of the Ivorian crisis, may again become contentious and delay the elections. While most Ivorian stakeholders, including President Gbagbo and Prime Minister Soro, provided positive feedback on the mobile courts operations, the opposition party Rassemblement des républicains complained that many Ivorians had not been able to access the mobile courts, in particular in the west owing to the presence of militias, even if those were dormant.

43. On the security front, most parties and civil society groups insist that disarmament must precede the elections. For their part, the Forces nouvelles maintain that they would canton their combatants and place their weapons in storage, in keeping with the provisions of the third supplementary agreement, once the civic service and reintegration programmes are in place. However, the civic service programme is still only a concept and donors insist that they would fund reintegration programmes only if they were involved in designing and implementing them (see para. 20 above). Furthermore, the Government has yet to make funds available for payment of the allowances to the combatants during their stay in the cantonment sites.

44. With regard to the reunification of the two forces, the Chiefs of Staff of the defence and security forces and the Forces nouvelles informed the assessment mission that they had developed a proposal for a unified transition army, which would be composed of mixed units responsible for providing security to the electoral process. However, the proposal has yet to be approved by the President and Prime Minister. Moreover, decisions on the long-standing issues concerning the ranks and salaries of the Forces nouvelles elements that will rejoin the army are still pending.

45. Work on the reintegration of Forces nouvelles elements into the national police and gendarmerie has similarly stalled, following the police and gendarmerie commanders rejection of the proposal by the Facilitator to include 4,000 Forces nouvelles personnel in the police and gendarmerie forces. The commanders insist that they would accept only the 600 Forces nouvelles security auxiliaries trained by UNOCI in 2006 and the matter has been referred back to the Facilitator.

46. Many Ivorian stakeholders expressed concern that the militias, which are reported to be currently dormant, may be easily mobilized during the elections, especially in the western part of the country and in Abidjan. Although UNOCI has handed over disarmament sites to the Government, a plan for completing the disarmament and dismantling of the militias has yet to be developed.

47. Other security concerns raised by both Ivorian and international partners include the possibility of civil unrest emanating from the population's frustration with the slow pace of progress in the peace process and the continuing exploitation by armed groups, in particular in the north, as well as possible ethnic and land tenure disputes in the west, where large numbers of internally displaced persons are already returning. In this regard, the Chief of Staff of the defence and security forces of Côte d'Ivoire, together with the police and gendarmerie commanders, reiterated the request for the Security Council to grant an exception to the arms embargo to allow the import of riot control gear and side weapons for the police and of spare parts for the military transport helicopter. According to the Ivorian officials, these items would be needed during the electoral period.

48. All Ivorian parties and civil society groups who met with the assessment mission were cognizant of the dangers that could result from elections that would be perceived as lacking credibility. They cited Kenya's recent post-election experience and emphasized the importance of the certification mandate of my Special Representative in guaranteeing the credibility of the elections. Some stakeholders expressed concern that the current consensus on the elections could unravel, in particular if various parties began to feel that they would be marginalized if they lost the elections. In this regard, various political parties and civil society groups stressed the importance of avoiding a winner-takes-all scenario and called for an inclusive post-elections political arrangement.

B. Recommendations for the role of the United Nations Operation in Côte d'Ivoire in supporting the remaining tasks under the Ouagadougou Agreement

49. The Operation will focus on the following: (a) helping the Ivorian parties to surmount the challenges and minimize the risks identified in the present report; (b) supporting the parties and the Facilitator in their efforts to keep the peace process on track; (c) contributing to a secure environment for the elections; (d) contributing, through my Special Representative, towards enhancing the credibility of the electoral process; (e) providing logistical support for the elections; (f) assisting national institutions in carrying out all the key tasks that must be completed before the elections; and (g) devising an effective and targeted public information strategy to sensitize the Ivorian players about the role of UNOCI in the peace process.

50. In order to contribute to a secure environment for the elections, it is essential to maintain the current troop strength of UNOCI until after the elections. The UNOCI military component will continue to implement its new concept of operations, work with the Licorne force to assist the parties in implementing the Facilitator's proposals for the reintegration of Forces nouvelles personnel in the national police and the army and prepare contingency plans for possible stabilization interventions to prevent acts of violence aimed at disrupting the peace process. Such contingency plans would include the redeployment of the Operation's formed police units and contingent crowd control capabilities to support national security institutions where the latter may not be adequately equipped to manage violent incidents. Recommendations on drawing down UNOCI will be made after the elections.

51. The UNOCI police component will continue to assist in reintegrating Forces nouvelles elements into the national police and gendarmerie on the basis of agreements reached by the parties and will continue to support the training and mentoring of those elements. The Operation will also provide logistical support for the redeployment of the national police to the northern part of the country in support of an agreed, comprehensive security plan for the electoral process developed by the Ivorian authorities, with the assistance of UNOCI and the Licorne force. The police component will also devise, jointly with the military component, a plan for the possible redeployment of the Operation's riot control capabilities to identified high-risk areas, including the western part of the country, Bouaké and Abidjan.

52. With regard to disarmament, UNOCI will continue to support an accelerated implementation of the cantonment of forces, in keeping with the third supplementary agreement. In that regard, it is important to obtain from both the Forces nouvelles and the Ivorian defence and security forces the promised lists of combatants, troops and weapons. The Operation will also work with the Facilitator to encourage the parties to agree on an effective arrangement for the control of the weapons placed under storage, in keeping with the supervisory role entrusted to UNOCI and the Licorne force under the Ouagadougou Agreement. The Operation will encourage the Government to involve donor partners in designing the reintegration and civic service programmes, to formulate a plan for completing the dismantling of the remaining militias in the western part of the country and in Abidjan, and to develop an effective programme and funding strategy for the long-term reintegration of ex-combatants.

53. The Operation will closely monitor each stage of the identification and electoral processes in support of my Special Representative's certification mandate. Such monitoring will enable the Ivorian parties and the Facilitator to take corrective measures, should issues arise that would make certification of any stage of the electoral process difficult. My Special Representative will fulfil his certification mandate in close consultation with the Facilitator and relevant Ivorian institutions, such as the Independent Electoral Commission and the Constitutional Council.

54. The Operation will also provide logistical support for the elections. It is reviewing the logistics needs identified by the Independent Electoral Commission in the light of its own logistical capacities. Should additional air assets and vehicles be required for the elections, it would be advisable to explore the possibility of obtaining them from the United Nations Mission in Liberia, within the framework of inter-mission cooperation.

55. The Operation will continue to assist the Ivorian authorities in completing such other critical tasks as the restoration of State authority, including the judiciary and the rule of law, throughout the country and the promotion and protection of human rights. It will also continue to work with the United Nations country team, the World Bank and other international partners to promote social cohesion and community reconciliation; will facilitate the delivery of humanitarian assistance and support for recovery, especially in the northern and western regions of the country; and will promote the peace process through its public information capacity.

56. In my thirteenth progress report on UNOCI (S/2007/275), I had recommended that UNOCI review its troop level once two key benchmarks, the disarmament process and the restoration of State authority throughout the country, had been completed. As indicated in the present report, these key benchmarks have yet to be attained. Following the anticipated elections, consultations with the newly elected Government will be essential in order to determine the nature and level of support the Ivorian authorities will require from UNOCI for the legislative and local elections before the Operation begins to draw down.

C. Support to persons affected by the conflict

57. The majority of the estimated 700,000 internally displaced persons in Côte d'Ivoire are not expected to seek assisted resettlement. The humanitarian community in Côte d'Ivoire is therefore focusing on providing assistance to 111,000

internally displaced persons from the western part of the country, some 55,000 of which had spontaneously returned to their communities by the end of 2007. The remaining internally displaced persons in the west could be resettled by the end of 2008 if the peace process continues to make steady progress without disruption. As the United Nations system and its partners are transiting from humanitarian response to recovery and development interventions, an exit strategy will be developed for the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in the country.

D. Supporting efforts to create a positive political environment

58. Recognizing the role of the media in shaping Ivorian political discourse, the Ouagadougou Agreement follow-up mechanisms have called for the development of a code of conduct for journalists during the forthcoming electoral campaign period, as well for equitable access to the State media. The Operation will monitor compliance with that code of conduct, in the context of its regular media monitoring, as well as in the performance of my Special Representative's role in respect of his certification mandate. In this regard, Prime Minister Soro's request for UNOCI to issue regular public reports on the Ivorian media could contribute towards curbing dangerous trends in the media that might incite elections-related violence. The Operation will therefore initiate consultations with all parties, including President Gbagbo, to ascertain their concurrence with the initiative.

E. Supporting efforts to promote and protect human rights

59. The Operation and its partners will continue to monitor the human rights situation in Côte d'Ivoire, focusing on women and children, while also building the capacity of national institutions to promote and protect human rights. There have been two encouraging developments: (a) a presidential decree has been signed validating the election of the national human rights commission executive board, paving the way for the commission to formally embark on designing and implementing human rights strategies, and (b) following the successful implementation of action plans, the Forces nouvelles and pro-Government militia groups in the west have been removed from the list of parties to armed conflict that recruit or use child soldiers (see S/2002/1299, annex).

60. However, abuses of children's rights, including sexual violence, remain of serious concern throughout the country. The Operation and the United Nations country team will therefore continue to monitor child rights violations in accordance with Security Council resolution 1612 (2005), to work together with the Government and partner institutions to adopt a national action plan on sexual violence and to support efforts to establish a national commission for war-affected children. Furthermore, the Operation continues to support the establishment of human rights clubs, now active in over 70 schools throughout the country. It has trained over 20 human rights organizations on monitoring techniques and partnered with a national non-governmental organization in facilitating the production and dissemination of awareness materials to over 30,000 people and civil society organizations, with financial support from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Embassy of Canada.

F. Supporting the economic recovery process

61. The Ivorian economy continues to recover, with growth in 2007 reaching 1.7 per cent as a result of increased investment and strong performances in telecommunications, construction and commerce. Growth is projected to double in 2008, owing to recovery in oil and agriculture export prices.

62. While the Government's short-term priority is to fund its recovery programme, the Ministry of Planning and Development is in the process of developing a poverty reduction strategy paper that will allow Côte d'Ivoire to benefit from the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative in the medium-term. The interim poverty reduction strategy for 2003-2007 has been expanded to include the creation of conditions favourable to national reconciliation, which include such issues as land tenure, identification and other underlying causes of the Ivorian conflict. The United Nations and the World Bank are also working to align their programmatic objectives with the national poverty reduction strategy. Both the national poverty reduction strategy paper and the United Nations Development Assistance Framework will be human rights-based.

G. Financial support for the implementation of the Ouagadougou Agreement

63. In order to facilitate the mobilization and coordination of financial assistance in support of the implementation of the processes under the Ouagadougou Agreement, the United Nations Development Programme has established two trust funds. The first, in support of recovery programmes, has received contributions in the amount of $8.4 million, with an additional $12.4 million pledged. The second, in support of the organization of elections, has received $16.6 million in contributions. In addition, the International Monetary Fund provided direct budget support in the amount of $60 million in 2007 under its emergency post-conflict assistance and will provide the same for 2008, including in support of elections and social rehabilitation. In February, the African Development Bank and the Government signed a grant agreement in the amount of $31.4 million for a multi-sectoral project that will focus on the restoration of public services and on rural development.

64. In response to the concerns of donors that pledged funds for the recovery programme could not be disbursed in the absence of clearly articulated projects, the United Nations Development Programme has provided a team of consultants to assist in the drafting of the projects. In February, the International Monetary Fund recommended that a larger part of the revenues generated by the oil industry be allocated to the implementation of the peace process.

65. The United Nations system has also worked closely with the Government of Burkina Faso to secure financial support for the facilitation of the peace process. In this regard, an assistance package in the amount of $700,000 was provided through the emergency window of the Peacebuilding Fund to support the facilitation efforts of the President of Burkina Faso, in his capacity as chairman of ECOWAS. The United Nations is also supporting the operations of the office of the Facilitator's special representative in Abidjan through a project administered by the United Nations Office for Project Services, to which the Government of Norway contributed approximately $330,000 in 2007, with additional contributions expected

in 2008 from the World Bank, France and the European Union-funded ECOWAS Peace and Security Fund.

VII. Observations

66. The Ouagadougou Agreement has built upon the limited progress made by previous agreements and achieved greater strides, bringing Côte d'Ivoire closer to national elections over the past year. Its most significant achievements include the sustained, albeit still fragile, positive political and security environment that now prevails in the country, the incipient recovery of the economy and the advances made in the identification of the population, which has been at the heart of the Ivorian crisis. The steady progress achieved so far can be attributed to the sustained partnership between President Gbagbo and Prime Minister Soro, national ownership of the peace process, as well as President Compaoré's effective facilitation role and the technical and material support provided by Côte d'Ivoire's international partners, including UNOCI, the Licorne force, donors, the humanitarian community and the international financial institutions.

67. I welcome the consensus among the Ivorian parties to hold the elections in 2008. The challenges ahead will, however, subject that consensus to a rigorous test. The parties should do everything possible to preserve the spirit of reconciliation, sustained dialogue and inclusiveness engendered by the Ouagadougou Agreement in order to keep the peace process on track. In addition, it is essential to support the fragile political and security stability in the country with concrete progress on disarmament; the dismantling of the militias; the rehabilitation and reintegration of ex-combatants; the reunification of the country; and the full restoration of State authority throughout the country. Without tangible progress on these key issues, the progress achieved so far will remain vulnerable to the risk of serious reversals.

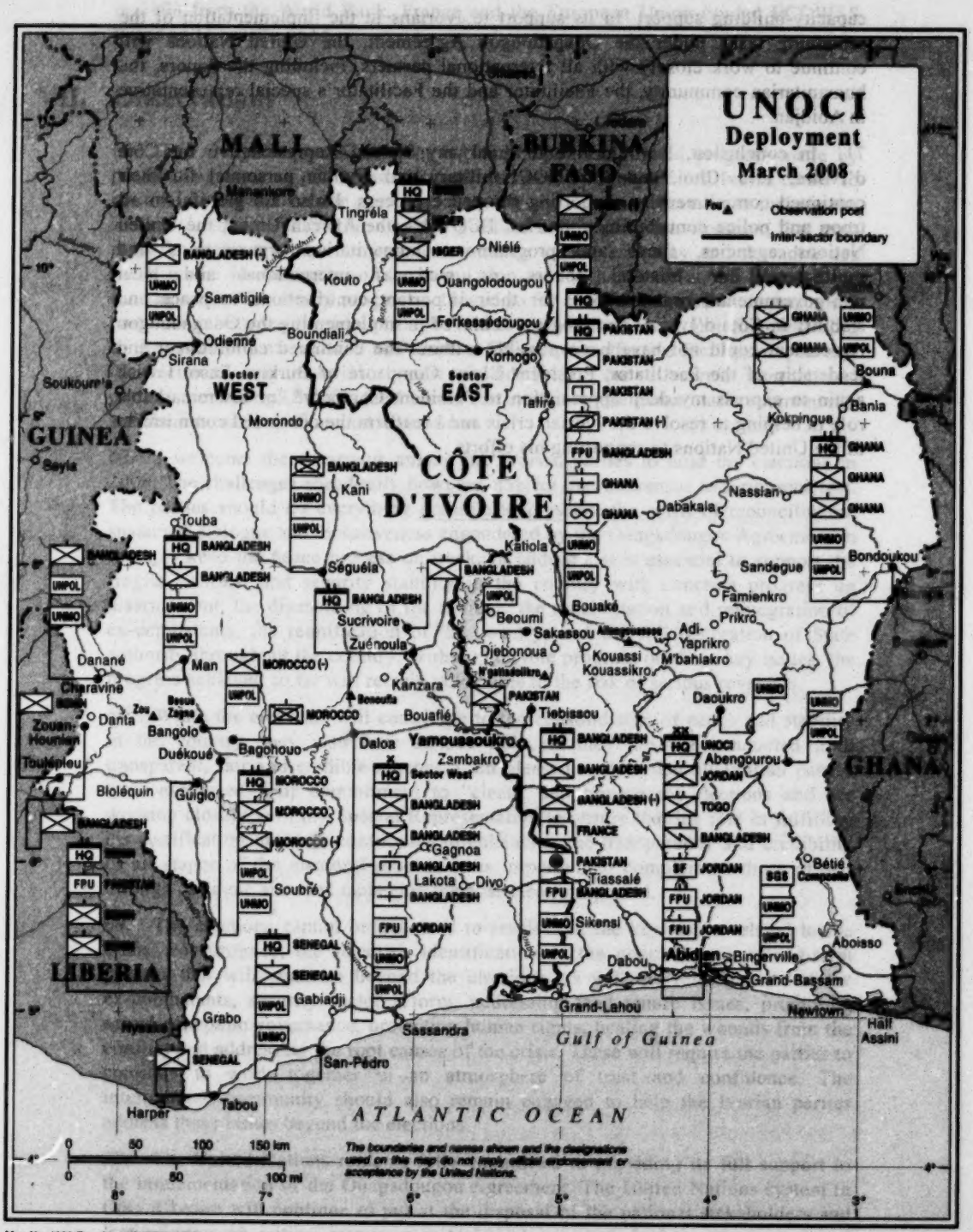
68. While the elections will contribute to the consolidation of peace and stability in the country, they also bear serious risks, if they are not conducted in a transparent, fair and credible manner. I am pleased to note that all Ivorian parties have expressed their commitment to "clean" and transparent elections and are working closely with my Special Representative to ensure that his role in fulfilling his certification mandate contributes to enhancing the transparency and credibility of all stages of the electoral process. It is important to complement those efforts through dialogue aimed at managing the post-elections period.

69. The elections cannot be expected to resolve all the key issues related to the crisis. For instance, the sensitive identification of the population is a long-term process that will continue beyond the elections, as will the reintegration of the ex-combatants, security sector reform, addressing land tenure issues, promoting sound economic governance, protecting human rights, healing the wounds from the conflict and addressing the root causes of the crisis. These will require the parties to continue to work together in an atmosphere of trust and confidence. The international community should also remain engaged to help the Ivorian parties address these issues beyond the elections.

70. The United Nations remains fully committed to providing its full support to the implementation of the Ouagadougou Agreement. The United Nations system in Côte d'Ivoire will continue to put at the disposal of the national stakeholders and institutions such critical resources as technical expertise, logistical assistance and

capacity-building support. In its support to Ivorians in the implementation of the remaining tasks under the Ouagadougou Agreement, the United Nations will continue to work closely with all international partners, including the donors, the humanitarian community, the Facilitator and the Facilitator's special representative in Abidjan.

71. In conclusion, I would like to thank my Special Representative for Côte d'Ivoire, Y. J. Choi, and all UNOCI military and civilian personnel for their continued commitment to supporting the peace process. I also am grateful to all troop and police contributing countries, ECOWAS, the African Union, the United Nations agencies, funds and programmes, humanitarian organizations and multilateral and bilateral donors, as well as international and local non-governmental organizations, for their important contributions to peace and stability in Côte d'Ivoire. The progress achieved in implementing the Ouagadougou Agreement could not have been possible without the continued commitment and leadership of the Facilitator, President Blaise Compaoré of Burkina Faso. I wish again to express my deep appreciation to President Compaoré for his remarkable role in helping to resolve the Ivorian crisis and I reaffirm the continued commitment of the United Nations to supporting his efforts.



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